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RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0905
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RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 1597
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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [BL](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#)
SUBJECT: COCHABAMBA: MORE CONCERNS AND SUSPICIONS

REF: LA PAZ 2470

Classified By: A/DCM Mike A. Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In meetings with the Private Business Federation of Cochabamba, former Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa's spokesman, and the civic organization umbrella group Confidence Network, all expressed concern about the consequences of DEA's expulsion from Bolivia, the imminent approval of President Morales' constitution on January 25, and suspicions of political/civic groups in other departments. In the meantime, interim Prefect and ex-Catholic priest Rafael Puente has become one of the Bolivian government's mouthpieces for attacking the Catholic Church.

PRIVATE BUSINESS FEDERATION

12. (C) Emboff met with the board of directors of the Private Business Federation of Cochabamba (Federacion de Empresarios Privados). The members expressed their concern about the recent expulsion of the DEA by the Bolivian government. Several of the members who export via land to neighboring countries said their businesses have already been affected by increased inspections at the border by Brazilian and Argentinean authorities. One director told Emboff that "the DEA supported the FELCN (Bolivian anti-narcotic police) with their container inspections and certifications. Now that the DEA is being expelled the FELCN are reducing the number of their certification inspections of tractor trailer containers and this causes our products to get hung up at the borders and subjects us to extra inspections and loss of merchandise and time." The Cochabamba businessmen only expect things to get worse for any legal products to be exported as Bolivia becomes labeled a "narco-state."

13. (C) Despite their concerns and objections to the current

Bolivian government's economic policies, the businessmen are loathe to openly play politics. Federation President Rudy Rivera told Emboff that "we are not politicians, we are businessmen. We oppose the proposed Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) constitution but will not have any type of "no" campaign. Each person should vote their conscience." Several board members also expressed their distrust of their Santa Cruz counterparts. Mr. Rivera said the Federation is looking for a Santa Cruz counterpart to coordinate with but that "the crucenos (persons from Santa Cruz) are busy trying to cut deals with the government. They falsely think they can save themselves by dancing with the devil." Another director criticized the business chamber's national headquarters located in La Paz, citing a lack of communication with Cochabamba.

MANFRED'S CHEERLEADER

14. (C) Erick Fajardo, former Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa's spokesman and communications advisor, told Emboff that Manfred is busy in the United States finding support for a future run for the presidency. "Its obvious that Manfred is the only one who can offer a true alternative to Evo" according to Fajardo. Mr. Fajardo did point out that Reyes Villa may be out of the country for "years, as it takes time to develop an organization just as the MAS project took ten years to gain the presidency." Fajardo also admitted that it will be extremely difficult to win against Morales in a presidential election next year and that Reyes Villa fears he will be thrown in jail and politically prosecuted if he returns to Bolivia. Mr. Fajardo declared CONALDE (the grouping of opposition governors and civic committees) dead and predicted increased infighting among the regional opposition. Fajardo said he was worried about the uncertainty created by the Government of Bolivia expelling the DEA and the potential increase in crime and drugs in the city of Cochabamba.

RED CONFIANZA: NO CONFIDENCE IN OTHERS

15. (C) Red Confianza (Confidence Network) is an umbrella organization for approximately twenty Cochabamba-based civic organizations with several hundred members. The group is not affiliated with any political party but rather seeks to promote a "western style modern democracy" in Bolivia. In a meeting with representatives from the network, the members expressed fear of the direct and in-direct impact of the DEA's expulsion from Bolivia. The Red Confianza leaders said several of their members owned houses leased to the DEA and shops where DEA employees and their families frequented. The direct economic loss for those individuals is immediate. In the medium to long term, Red Confianza is worried about the increase in drug trafficking and its affects on Cochabamba city as well as Bolivia's image within the international community. The organization is also concerned that the Bolivian Government will increasingly target USAID projects for termination.

16. (C) Red Confianza is slowly rolling out a "no" campaign for the January 25 constitutional referendum. One member expressed his disgust, saying "the traditional political parties have sold us down the river by agreeing to hold the referendum." Those present predicted that the MAS constitution would pass. Their objective is to lower the percentage by which it passes as much as possible. A former Cochabamba prefect and Red Confianza leader told Emboff, "We will have no moral authority to speak out against this government if the constitution passes with something like eighty percent." Looking beyond to the presidential elections, Red Confianza hopes that new leaders will emerge. Members had harsh words for "the La Paz political elite" and discounted Samuel Doria Medina and Tuto Quiroga as viable candidates. The most criticized was former President Carlos Mesa (who coined the half-moon "media luna" phrase), who was

called "a traitor and if not the direct cause of today's racist and totalitarian state, at least guilty of accelerating Bolivia's current crisis." Former Santa Cruz Civic Committee President German Antelo was mentioned as a possible "new" leader. According to Red Confianza, the MIR political party is trying to organize a meeting of all opposition political parties and civic organizations for December to try to form a united front.

¶7. (C) Finally, the group mentioned rumors of property purchases by Vice President Garcia Linera and Foreign Minister Choquehuanca as well rumors about the real purpose of the construction of the new UNASUR (the South American Union) military school. Red Confianza said the academy, being built in San Benito (about 35 minutes from Cochabamba), is supposed to rival WHINSEC but is raising suspicions because of direct Venezuelan involvement. One Red Confianza member with Bolivian military connections claimed the Venezuelans are building a landing strip in San Benito, questioning the need for a military airfield less than forty kilometers from Cochabamba's commercial/military airport.

A CONVENIENT MOUTHPIECE?

¶8. (SBU) As the government of Bolivia continues to step up its verbal attacks against the Catholic Church, interim Prefect and ex-Catholic priest Rafael Puente lashed out at Cardinal Julio Terrazas. Puente criticized the cardinal for having "a colonist mentality" and accused him of "wanting to maintain a state of slavery" in Bolivia
LAMBERT